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For the Enrichment of Jewish Thought

Celebrating Nathan Glazer's *American Judaism*

by Stephen Whitfield

The achievement of Nathan Glazer looms large when his *American Judaism* is assessed as a work of 1957 since few changes were made when its second edition appeared in 1974 other than an additional chapter that focuses on the pivotal year of 1967. His book can be considered a product of Professor Glazer's thinking of the 1950s when the American way of life was treated not as various but as singular, and when the Judeo-Christian tradition was seen as a force of national cohesiveness and strength. In that decade the effort to investigate what differences mean and where they matter—which Glazer has made the hallmark of his academic career—was not widely encouraged.

Only three years earlier, American Jewry had celebrated its tercentenary in the New World and injected its own upbeat mood into the triumphalist spirit of a moment in which national power and prosperity were at their peak. At the National Tercentenary Dinner in the fall 1954, the keynote address was delivered by President Eisenhower, whose most distant predecessor had pledged "to give bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance;" and that promise to the the nation's Jewish community had mostly been kept. There were innumerable blessings to be counted, and the path to full absorption into American society seemed unobstructed. Oscar Handlin's synoptic history of his co-religionists, published that year, was entitled *Adventure in Freedom*. One year later Will Herberg published *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, elevating his co-religionists to the status of equal partners in the piety that he claimed was the correlate of American citizenship, bestowing on the tiny Jewish population a role equivalent to the Taiwanese who occupied one of the five permanent seats in the U.N.'s Security Council.

Professor Glazer's book does not disparage the feelings of satisfaction that permeated the Jewish community; there was much cause for contentment and optimism.

But what lifts his volume from the inevitable constrictions of its era is an awareness of the unacknowledged tensions, the unaddressed problems that were also integral to the communal condition. One dilemma could be said to dwarf—and perhaps even to determine—all the others. He stated it in 1957 with lapidary power: "There comes a time—and it is just about upon us—when American Jews become aware of a contradiction between the kind of society America wants to become—and indeed the kind of society most Jews want it to be—and the demands of the Jewish religion." He then mentioned three of those demands: the need to practice endogamy, the need to live as "a people apart" and the need to consider the Diaspora as Exile—until the divine restoration to the Holy Land. Whole books could be spun from that single sentence defining the contradiction and, indeed, at least two major books about American Jewry that are framed in the terms articulated by Professor Glazer come to mind.

The United States had become home to the largest, richest and probably most secure Jewish community in the millennia since Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. Yet, so soon after an anniversary drenched in collective pride, Professor Glazer held up a mirror that was cracking. He revealed, just over the horizon, the troubles that would stem from success and from promises fulfilled. He specified the difficulty the goal of an unmodulated integration would produce, which is that the American adjective would excessively modify the noun Judaism, leaving religion drastically reduced and distorted and risking obliteration. What might make the fate of American Jewry precarious, the author seemed to be saying, was that the very

ethos that permeated and inspired this minority group could not in any logically satisfactory way be reconciled with Judaism. The difference could not be split.

In suggesting the depth of the ideological problem Jews would have to face, Mr. Glazer was not writing as a theologian, and not quite as a prophet, but as an historian though he was not formally trained as one. Oddly enough, although he is usually considered a sociologist, he was trained instead in anthropology and linguistics and first made his reputation as a journalist and editor but he is now listed as an emeritus from a school of education.

Perhaps the difficulty of pinning him to a single discipline made him so apt a choice to write *American Judaism* since something misleading also hovers over that very title. Unlike its companion volumes in the *Chicago History of American Civilization*, John Tracy Ellis' *American Catholicism* and Winthrop Hudson's *American Protestantism*, Mr. Glazer's volume is not exclusively about worshipers, about subscribers to a faith, about practitioners of rituals. Rather, it is about an ethnic group that includes believers but is not synonymous with them. When he came to write what in 1957 was his final chapter, "The Religion of American Jews," other scholars had conducted so little research on this topic that he admitted he could "point to no decisive evidence for most of my assertions" (p. 131). The methodology of that chapter slowed the process of redemption since, according to the *Ethics of the Fathers* (6:6), he who "retells exactly what he has heard, and reports a thing in the name of him who said it...brings deliverance to the world." In 1957 the author had so few sources to cite that salvation had to be further postponed; and indeed the very title of the chapter, "The Religion of American Jews," which one might have thought was the topic of the entire book, suggests how wide-ranging (as well as pioneering) Mr. Glazer had to be to encompass what he considered *American Judaism*.

Ambiguities are bound to haunt the scrutiny of the Jewish religion, which simply cannot be treated as though it were a body of doctrines, rituals and laws, but is indeed a phenomenon that spills into what Professor

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Glazer has called the "historical creation of the way Jews have lived; while the way Jews have lived, and the way they live today, is, in large measure, a creation of Judaism. It seems impossible to divide the two" (pp. 6-7). It would have been worse than misleading—it would have been virtually impossible—to pluck from the saga of Jews in the United States elements of the sacred—a creed, a liturgy, a calendar—and pretend to do justice to something called *American Judaism*. Jewishness itself keeps intruding. Exactly a decade after publication of this book's first edition, the fears for Israel's survival immediately before the Six-Day War and the astonishing results of that war caused perhaps the most admired proponent of American Judaism, Abraham Joshua Heschel, to exclaim: "I had not known how deeply Jewish I was." Even for a religious thinker, something else existed in his identity so deep that a political crisis in the Middle East exposed it, forcing him to acknowledge the power of peoplehood as more fundamental to his being even than faith. How then can that "historical creation" that Professor Glazer defined as Judaism be matched with what else most of American Jewry believe in? How well could that historical creation withstand the ideological pressures that an alluringly open society seemed to place on its adherents?

The prospects for a viable future for Judaism in America Professor Glazer did not rate highly. Modern conditions had eroded the authority of institutional religion during the course of the previous two centuries, leaving Judaism, if anything, even more beleaguered. He detected pockets of authenticity and seriousness in Orthodoxy, without quite anticipating its resilience. He later acknowledged elsewhere in the community signs of spiritual vitality, works of genuine religious thinking, traces of sophisticated grappling with the metaphysical mysteries. But he was dubious of how widely such evidence of passion and commitment could be located. Nor could the second edition be read as an emphatic revision of the 1957 portrait of an American Jewry largely tone-deaf to the appeal of faith, largely indifferent to the most austere challenges of religion.

Yet it is that very religion that, more sharply than any other factor, has distinguished Jews from the nation's other minorities and has offered a rationale for the survivalism Mr. Glazer described as so problematic. For unlike other ethnic groups, the Jews have a teleology—what might be called, if the term is still fashionable, a "metanarrative"—that gives meaning to their perpetuation as a distinct collectivity, to be achieved and revealed at the end of days. Judaism suggests that being and remaining Jewish has a point. And what gives his account so much of its enduring trenchancy is his savvy demonstration of how unimag-

inable that religion is without the experience of that people itself, which must somehow come to terms with a religion whose dictates represent a barrier to complete integration and even perhaps nearly to extinction. The last chapter of the first edition ends with uncertainty as to whether contemporary models of a life loyal to Judaism were conspicuous in America. The epilogue to the 1974 second impression ends by wondering what this minority's commitment to remaining Jewish might mean. The transformations wrought in the succeeding 25 years ranged from stratospheric rates of intermarriage to the inescapable memorializations and representations of the Holocaust, from the noticeable shifts to the right in politics and in observance to the utterly unforeseen role of women in worship and in communal affairs generally. Mr. Glazer's book demonstrated how Judaism depended on the activities and expression of a people and wondered how that people could live without a viable Judaism. That is why Professor Glazer's volume remains a model of how to blend involvement and detachment, historical synthesis and social observation, pithy expression with resonant generalization.

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Is "Process Thought" Progress?

Jewish Theology and Process Thought
edited by Sandra B. Lubarsky
and David Ray Griffin
Albany: State University of
New York Press

A Review Essay
by Earle J. Coleman

The process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne attracts Christian theologians, Buddhist scholars, Jewish theologians and proponents of Jewish-Christian dialogue because, rather than present a provincial system, Whitehead strives for "the most general systemization of civilized thought." Thus the appropriateness of process thought for Judaism will depend on any universal features in process theology. The doctrine that everything is subject to change is one such cardinal principle. Levi A. Olan expresses the dynamic nature of process thought: "Our picture of reality, then, is not yesterday's matter but today's relationships, processes and events." It is not just that the universe is in flux, which is comparable to the doctrine of *anicca* or impermanence in early Buddhism, but so

also is the divine itself. While Maimonides says of God "that He undergoes no change at all," process thinkers believe, for example, that I-Thou relations require the divine to respond to his creatures in ever-changing ways. Therefore, process thought denies that God is immutable. As Olan expresses the point, "A change in man's response to God brings about a change in God's judgment." Sol Tanenzapf adds that what humans do or refuse to do affects God, just as God suffers when his creatures suffer and rejoice when they flourish.

Aristotle's God, in the form of a sublimely unmoved mover, is not the deity that Jews, Moslems and Christians typically seek. His unmoved mover motivates humans by attracting them and thereby galvanizing them into action but the relationship is asymmetrical in that humans are completely unable to influence God. Objecting to any such idea of God, Lubarsky writes, "If God is unaffected by human action, then all our efforts 'to be holy' or 'to establish God's kingdom on earth' or 'to do God's will' can have no real significance to the one who matters most."

In process theology, God is not perfect for whatever changes had the potential to do so and what is potential is imperfect (i.e., unrealized or short of perfection). Of course, traditional theists have held that God is perfect and that this implied divine immutability. If something is perfect, why should it change? Would not any change be a turn for the worse? Some process thinkers seek to escape this conclusion by arguing that the divine has a being side (an unchanging side) as well as a becoming side (a changing side). Naturally, critics claim this proposal is contradictory or paradoxical. Sometimes process thinkers meet traditionalists head on by asserting that perfection entails change (i.e., adaptation to a changing world). In favor of the view that God is changing, they cite the appeal of a developing God instead of a static divinity. This, however, seems to beg the question since it is not a logical contradiction to assert that a perfect, unchanging absolute exists. As Plato would argue, those who have only seen the flickering shadows are not in a position to know the eternally unchanging. Alternatively, God may exist analogously to the ocean: in constant transformation but fundamentally unchanging.

Denying God the status of the creator is another way in which process thought departs from traditional theism. Clearly, the most fundamental attribute of the Judeo-Christian God is that he is the creator of the universe. Of course, this leads to philosophical conundrums such as: Why did a perfect God create this imperfect universe? Why didn't He create it sooner? What was He doing before He created the universe? And how could He create from utter nothingness? Process philosophers deny any such creation *ex nihilo* and thereby have no need to wrestle with these perplexities. In

traditional terms, the divine is immanent and the universe is an uncreated process that contains the deity. Of course, the process philosophers are hardly radicals, for even the earliest of Western philosophers—the Presocratics—taught that it is impossible to get something from nothing.

Process thought affirms that just as the physical universe evolves and God develops, there is also change in the human spirit. Unlike Aristotle or Maimonides, process thinkers deny that all humans share an essence. Process philosophy holds that Christians and Jews are spiritually malleable beings and ideally they will become more sensitive toward each other as both find themselves in a pluralistic and changing world. Anson Laytner cites the World Parliament of Religions and its centennial in 1993 as evidence of a growing interfaith movement that works to overcome past misconceptions, hatreds and tensions. He also calls for Christianity to recognize that “all religions may be equally valid (or even partially valid) paths to that which it calls God and Christ.” The process view of the divine, in which God is a developing being, means that all theologies are inadequate; consequently, dialogue among religions will profit all of them. After all, as William A. Beardslee notes, there is not any “pure experience of Scripture. We always deal with Scripture-and-interpretation.” Nahum Ward puts the religious choice this way: Either moderns accept the Torah literally or they benefit from critical, contemporary insights. Process thinkers sometimes try to join the truth of the Torah with recent scholarship, asserting, for example, that Moses did encounter God but the Biblical account is only one possible interpretation. Ward also wonders how the Torah, if it must cohere with the present world view, can challenge this very outlook. While process thinkers predicate change of God, the universe and humans, Beardslee carries the theme to sacred scripture and, in particular, to the creative transformation that can take place between readers, the text and God’s presence in their lives. Surely, Beardslee is correct in maintaining that our encounter with sacred writings should transform us; and it is said that Vaysha, who is credited with writing the *Mahabharata*, made a similar claim about literature to the effect that if one listens carefully to a story s/he will never be the same again.

Of course, change can often be unsettling, as when the Christian process philosopher John B. Cobb Jr. says that Christianity has no essence (i.e., no permanent doctrines or practices that forever define the religion). Similarly, early Buddhism’s doctrine of universal change profoundly challenged the traditional Indian belief in an unchanging soul or *atman*. With process philosophers devoting so much attention to change, it is important to recognize that they do not iden-

tify God with the process itself for this would be naturalism not theism.

Philosophers ask if God’s all-powerful nature enables him to change the past (e.g., bring it about that there never was a Holocaust or to create a stone too heavy for himself to lift. Of course, process philosophers avoid such logical puzzles by conceding that God’s power is limited. Indeed, Harold S. Kushner asks: “What kind of a God would create a world in which God has all the power?” He then argues that God can do anything but only if He operates through human and other instruments. Hans Jonas regards omnipotence as paradoxical for it is a relational concept that negates all relations—including resistance to the omnipotent power. For Jonas, God’s goodness is compatible with evil if and only if God is not all-powerful. To the contrary, traditional theologians argue that God’s goodness is

Process thought is controversial not only because it denies certain traditional attributes to God; in addition, the God of process thought often possesses attributes that are antithetical to those of traditional theologies.

compatible with omnipotence and evil since the latter is a means to a greater good.

According to process theologians, God’s providential power is persuasive or evocative, not coercive. Here one thinks of Aristotle’s God who attracts rather than compels. In short, God’s power is not one that can overpower humans. Some writers ascribe both coercive and persuasive power to God. The first is evident in God’s laws of nature that compel assent and the second is apparent when the goodness of God serves as an ideal for human behavior. Process philosophers use the latter, persuasive model to address the problem of evil for suffering arises when humans, operating under their own power, freely choose to veer from the ideal. In this context, omnipotence can only refer to the greatest power that one being could possibly have rather than to absolutely unqualified power. It follows that there is a distinction between the will of God and what will actually occur, thereby undermining the idea that not even a sparrow falls except in conformity to the will of the divine. David Ray Griffin identifies a dilemma for theologians, who insist that God has coercive power, but refrains from exercising it: If God has such power, this leaves room for His employing it to put things right someday. But if God has this power, why has He not already employed it on behalf of the horrendously oppressed? A focus on persuasive power enables a process thinker to dismiss

such theological puzzles, but one must ask if the price—rejecting such traditional predicates as omnipotence—is too high.

Not surprisingly, process thinkers are reluctant to attribute omniscience to God. For example, Norbert M. Samuelson interprets Gersonides to mean that God’s perfect knowledge does not include definite knowledge of the future. Those who hold such a view escape from another paradox: If God knows every choice that humans will ever make, how can they be free to do otherwise? And with respect to the divine, one might wonder, for instance, if an awesome God, that which there is nothing greater, can know what it is like to be utterly terrified.

Process theology is controversial not only because it denies certain traditional attributes of God; in addition, the God of process theology often possesses attributes that are antithetical to those of traditional theologies. According to Alvin J. Reines, “God is the enduring possibility of being.” Since Aristotle, however, philosophers and theologians have tended to understand God as pure actuality rather than as potentially. In short, traditional theists hold that God must be fully realized with no potential remaining. To the contrary, Reines argues that God is not actually existent because to be such is always to be limited—an actual oak tree is limited in that it cannot be an actual bird. Moreover, one cannot imagine anything that is unlimited. So, if something is actual then it is unavoidably finite. Still, traditional theists would reply that God’s being could not be merely possible, for to be merely possible is to be unfulfilled and to be such is to be imperfect. One also might add the aesthetic point that since there is little or no poetry in Reines’ abstract definition of God, there is little or no divinity.

Of Auschwitz, Hans Jonas asks: “Why could God have let it happen?” But according to process thought, God could not have prevented it precisely because He is not all-powerful. Moreover, if humans are to be free, rather than automatons, then God cannot interfere with their use or abuse of freedom. Process philosophers find advantages in believing God possesses only limited power. For example, because many events diverge from God’s control, one cannot interpret human misfortune and suffering as punishment from God. Surely one would not want to interpret the agony of an infant as punishment from the divine. Of course the process thinker does not regard God as powerless; indeed, God energizes changes in the universe by serving as an exemplar who, unlike Aristotle’s deity, also acts.

As the theological pertains to what has as end or purpose, the most extreme examples of evil are sometimes called “dysteleological surds,” as such they are intrinsically, irreducibly evil and serve no instrumental good whatsoever. Pointing to the Holocaust and a child born with AIDS,

Reines correctly identifies the need for an account that speaks to such horrors. His own explanation, however, is hardly an existential reply to humans in distress: "The possibilities required by the godhead to prevail over nothingness are of such a nature that actualities are dysteleological surds arising from them."

It is interesting that Griffin has framed an axiological argument for the existence of God for it is on the valuational nature of God that process philosophers and non-process philosophers readily agree: God is the ultimate value that moves humans, irrespective of whether the divine is *Yahweh*—Aristotle's unmoved mover or process philosopher's greatest reality. Griffin reasons that one must posit the existence of God to explain how potential values, which have never been realized, can exist and how they can move humans to actualize them. His platonic conclusion is that God must exist as the locus of values. Future values can emerge only because they were latent within the divine; after all, for process thinkers, at least, one cannot get something for nothing.

A standard criticism of process theodicy asserts that it is unduly future oriented, having no satisfactory justification for the suffering of those who have lived before. According to the doctrine of reincarnation, one can justify any individual's suffering on the grounds that s/he deserves his/her present situation owing to his/her past actions. All receive exactly what they deserve. But with process thought, it appears that the world is a better place for those humans who arrive later. The world-in-process is getting better; it is evolving rather than devolving. Therefore, the philosopher of religion John H. Hick states of process theodicy, "...it involves a morally and religiously unacceptable elitism." This is, of course, incompatible with the traditional God who loves all His children equally.

In the end, process philosophers are disposed toward a kind of subjectivism because they think that every view about God is a subjective expression, a manifestation of one individual's consciousness; this is just to say that all concepts of God are based on personal, ineffable experiences rather than public data. Obviously, humans do filter their experiences according to their particular circumstances but this is no complete repudiation of objectivism. One may adopt a more moderate view in which theology has a measure of objectivity for perhaps it is not accidental that Jews, Christians, Moslems and other theists have largely come to agreement on the primary attributes of God.

Even on the idea of process, there are significant differences between Jewish thought and process philosophy. For example, according to Norbert M. Samuelson, Jews and process thinkers both believe that the universe is teleological but only Jewish philosophy affirms the end will be achieved.

Obviously most Jews and other theists will not reject such traits as omnipotence. Nevertheless, Judaism and other theistic faiths will undoubtedly find one thing to be of decided value in process thought: its insistence on the need for each generation to rethink the nature of God (i.e., the very attributes that the previous generation assigned unconditionally to the divine).

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Biblical Claims: The Historical Basis

*The Israelites in History
and Tradition*
by Niels Peter Lemche
Louisville, KY: Westminster/John
Knox Press

A Review Essay
by Kristin M. Swenson

One day before class, we students asked my dissertation adviser how he learned about the Revolutionary War in his British grade school. He replied, without a pause, "Just like you. England was busy with a number of things and consequently made some mistakes here." That's not how I remember learning about those glorious days of Washingtonian heroism, the Boston Tea Party, religious persecution and the celebrated victory of the righteous underdog against an overbearing old empire. "History," "Herstory," "Real History," "People's History," "Contextual History." Here in Richmond, Virginia, capital of the Confederacy, my husband talks about the Civil War as "that war of northern aggression." Never mind that he's Cuban!

In struggling to make some sense of the crisis in Kosovo, my questions were basic: Who are the Albanians, and how do they relate to the Serbs? How does being a Muslim compare to being Croatian? What is the Kosovo Liberation Army? And where is Yugoslavia anyway? When I took my questions to the Internet, I found the *serbia.info* news described NATO as "criminal aggressors" and "terrorists" while President Clinton explained that Milosevic was a "belligerent tyrant" and "Europe's worst demagogue." I wonder how Sad-damn Hussein felt about that, apparently ignored by our fickle devil radar.

In *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, Lemche asks just who were the Israelites. Where was Canaan or, for that matter, Israel? Was there a David? And what is this Bible? Oddly perhaps, in the course of reading his book, I gained some insight on

present world affairs. For, in asking about the nature of history, the telling of origins, of nations and of gods, Lemche addresses timeless issues. These are matters of ethnicity, religion and the process of creating a record of events. The substantial *Prolegomena* introduces the problem of reading Biblical texts as history and the tradition of scholarship in which this has been and continues to be done. It also introduces the problem of how to define ethnicity and nation, concluding that it has something to do with "an indefinite sentiment of belonging to somewhere" (p. 15), though finally "ethnic groups are by definition unstable, with borders that can be transgressed in every possible way" (p. 20).

In "Playing the von Ranke Game," Lemche outlines the basis for determining the hard facts of history from the sources that we have. This he does according to von Ranke's admonition to "concentrate on the acknowledged contemporary sources and delegate all other kinds of information to a second place" (p. 22). The fact that the Old Testament is a secondary source and so should be treated with suspicion about its historical claims is a theme that runs through Lemche's book. In the tradition of Biblical minimalists, Lemche refuses to accept as historical reporting those things that cannot be supported and verified by unquestionably primary sources. He deflates the self-supporting conclusion about Israelite ethnicity and nationality that have come from misleading evaluation of archaeological discoveries. He's not afraid to present these as quite ludicrous. For example, regarding a three-room house as an ethnic marker he writes, "the burden has been removed from the shoulders of nomads that they should have invented new house forms almost as soon as they settled" (p. 32).

Lemche provides a helpful description and analysis of the discoveries and interpretations of those artifacts and inscriptions that might bear clues in the search to find Israel; and he reviews the arguments of those scholars that have determined the course of historical Biblical studies. By finally dismantling them bit by bit, he reveals that the bases for such Biblical "history" is simply a paraphrasing of the Biblical stories. And stories they are; but stories told with a political and religious purpose. For "[h]istory is one of the remedies open to the creators of ethnicity and, as has become conspicuous recently, it is of little importance whether this history is a real history or an invented one. History is written in order to create identity..." (p. 96). "The image of Israel as found in the historical books and in the prophetic literature in the Old Testament is, therefore, the image of Israel created by this religious community—it is a theory or a metaphor about an Israel that never was" (pp. 96-97).

Critical of the paraphrasing of many Biblical histories, Lemche also draws atten-

tion to details he thinks bear some truth. For example, Lemche resurrects the amphictyonic model of "all-Israel" (made popular by Martin Noth) not because that's the way the tribes "really were" in some specific historical past but because the Biblical writers may have borrowed that idea to describe a past they were busy reconstructing themselves. In the process, they sought to present a people chosen by God to inhabit a land they were always leaving in a history "that follows no historical laws—political, economical or human. It is a history totally dominated by Yahweh, who is much more than the God of history. He is the God who Himself creates the history..." (p. 93).

I like that because, at the end of our quest to determine the historicity of the Biblical narrative, we can laugh at ourselves and admit that maybe, just maybe, it really doesn't matter. Then we can get down to the business of asking about the text we have, the ideological and theological musings of a story that is ultimately metachronological. For, as Lemche writes, "The Biblical historical narrative is a story about an exile that somehow never ends. It is a program about a history to come rather than a tale about what happened in Palestine in ancient times" (p. 132).

Although this book will probably make many people uncomfortable, from his dismissive criticism of giants in Biblical scholarship to the fact that we cannot prove an historical Israel(ite) that suits the Biblical picture, Lemche offers an important corrective to the eager search for historical bases of Biblical claims. After all, even the Old Testament is conflicted about the "history" it presents. For instance, several, grossly different boundaries are given for the geography of Israel; and Canaan is only "Canaan" because of Deuteronomic ideas of what's right and what's wrong. "At the end we have a situation where Israel is not Israel, Jerusalem's not Jerusalem and David's not David. No matter how we twist the factual remains from ancient Palestine, we cannot have a Biblical Israel that is, at the same time, the Israel of the Iron Age" (p. 166).

In trying to piece together a meaningful picture of the Balkan dilemma, I had to refer to a track record of my Internet search in the "history" menu. In the process, I discovered that the reasons for my confusion were like those regarding the history of ancient Israel. People identify themselves one way, their enemies another and reports about them by a third party introduce yet another set of agendas. Running throughout is the problem of identifying terms—ethnic, religious, political, geographic—that sometimes overlap and sometimes blatantly change.

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Defining and Redefining Jewishness

How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America
by Karen Brodtkin
New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press

A Review Essay
by Steven Windmueller

Frequently, when we are introduced to books with cute or unusual titles, we have a tendency to assume the worse. Such titles can serve as a cover for an inferior piece of writing. When one first encounters Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks....*, there is such a notion to enjoy the cover page only to fear what may follow. Quite to the contrary, this is an intriguing piece of work. Serious in its message yet written in a comfortable style, this book hopefully will evoke a wide array of discussions on Jewish identity, matters concerning race and racial theory, and questions regarding America and its promise.

Most texts that explore the issues of "identity" attack this subject matter generally by evoking ideas taken from such traditional disciplines as history, sociology and psychology. This study draws from a variety of source materials, while also introducing this author's field of specialization—anthropology—into the equation. Brodtkin's research is carried through the lenses of her own family. They become the instruments through which she uncovers her ideas and insights about the Jewish people as a whole, and where we learn about her views on ethnicity and identity.

Jews have always wanted to be accepted by the majority culture. For Brodtkin, this translates by American context in their desire "to be white" since "whiteness is a state of privilege and belonging." For Jews to embrace their whiteness, they needed a "repellent opposite." The "deficiencies" of the African-American culture served this purpose. Being part of "white" America, is not without its limitations, and that becomes the challenge for Jews and others to hold to "fragments and memories of Jewishness." Professor Brodtkin instructs us to seek "alternatives to whiteness (as she has interpreted this notion), capitalism, modernism and stultifying organizations of social life they support." And, in the traditional call to arms, she asks us to use our history to gain "insights, new ideas and conversation..." This, then, is Professor Brodtkin's primary statement and plea to her readers.

Lest anyone believe that Brodtkin has singularly opened this door of research on

the issue of being the "other," it must be recalled that many sociologists and commentators on the contemporary Jewish scene have covered much of this ground. The question of Jewish "uniqueness" in an otherwise non-Jewish world represents a common motif. This dilemma was handled with great insight by Sylvia Barack Fishman in an intriguing article entitled "Negotiating Both Sides of the Hyphen," which unfortunately was not referenced by Professor Brodtkin. Where Fishman claims that Jews no longer can distinguish between that which is uniquely Jewish and that which might be defined as "American," Brodtkin establishes for us a similar comparison between being Jewish and being "white."

But let us be quite clear, there are additional messages being put forth by Professor Brodtkin beyond her prescription for recapturing one's "authentic sense of 'Yiddishkeit,'" as she would describe this Jewish journey. We are introduced to a whole host of subsidiary issues on gender and race. She suggests that "racial assignment of individuals and groups constitutes an institutionalized system of occupational and residential segregation, a key element in misguided public policy and a pernicious foundational principle in the construction of nationhood."

This book is partially autobiographical as the author introduces her academic themes through the early players of her life, primarily her grandmother and mother as well as the communities and neighborhoods in which her family would reside. The candor and forthrightness of Karen Brodtkin is a welcome addition. From the outset, we are informed of this writer's political and religious standing. She introduces us as well to her politically left biases and her Jewish "lite" credentials, while explaining that her original intent with this research was a more generic study of race, ethnicity and gender. We are rapidly introduced, however, to the reasons why Professor Brodtkin moved beyond her initial purpose in favor of this production, which is clearly more personalized and Jewishly directed. This book is more than an inquiry into the standard "Jewish question"; it is a Karen Brodtkin encounter session concerning the role of the Jewish "left" and the status of Jewish women in the American context. It appears this is Brodtkin's effort to come to grips with her own ethnicity, gender and politics.

"A Whiteness of Our Own? Jewishness and Whiteness in the 1950s and 1960s" (Chapter 5) in many ways is her most intensive and difficult chapter. Dealing with the issues of post-war America and the transformations that would occur, Professor Brodtkin introduces several intriguing, if not fallacious theoretical notions, at least in the mind of this reviewer. Her principal argument revolves around the contention that the Jewish intellectuals (all male) of this period "developed a new, hegemonic ver-

sion of Jewishness as a model minority culture that explained the structural privileges of white maleness as earned entitlements." She describes this phenomenon as a "Jewish form of whiteness, a whiteness of their own." Brodtkin sees Nathan Glazer, among others, as the architects of this "patriarchal whiteness." She suggests that by "reinventing blackness as monstrous and proclaiming their distance from it," these intellectuals redefined their Jewishness into an acceptable (i.e., "white") American context.

The weakness of this book is demonstrated in Brodtkin's exclusive immersion into the world of socialism and leftist politics, to the exclusion of other social forces and historical experiences. For Brodtkin, racist and gender policies can explain all economic and political events. As intriguing as is her thesis, her judgment calls are made through a very narrow ideological framework, expressed at times with a harshness that transcends her scholarship, reflecting her personal agendas. Many people will walk away from this book, expressing serious disagreements with the author, but they will find in her creative approach to this topic fascinating insights and observations.

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Engagement in Writing Jewish History

Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity
by Steven Zipperstein

Seattle: University of Washington Press

A Review Essay
by Brian Horowitz

In his new book that has emerged from the Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies at the University of Washington, Steven Zipperstein is raising important questions about the historical profession and Jewish identity. Although he does not offer any final answer, his questions and observations are fresh and important. This is a very thought-provoking work and one that reveals an aggressive honesty on the part of the historian. Here Zipperstein tells what he likes and does not like in the practice of history.

Even though he had himself been an academic puritan in upholding the value of objectivity, Zipperstein feels some ambivalence. He now believes that objective distance is not the highest position the historian

can attain. Instead, writing Jewish history demands a different approach: "Unlike historians of Sicilian or Irish immigrants to America, historians of East European Jewry know that the very ground we study is, by and large, a graveyard of Jewish life, all the more eerily evocative and awful to encounter because of what is no longer there. To write about this world as if we were not aware of this fate (as a good many historians of East European Jewry, myself included, have in the recent past sought to do) is, I'm now convinced, unrealistic, an antiseptic enterprise that overlooks the moral underpinnings and humanity implicit in any historical enterprise" (p. 6). Zipperstein's antidote to objectivity, however, is not the explicitly subjective "all narrative is a construct" but rather an acceptance or at least a consideration of the place of popular culture in historical writing. There is much that can be learned from the "chasm and the interrelationship between historical knowledge and widely disseminated, often strongly felt, popular assumptions about the world of Russian Jewry..." (p. 11).

Zipperstein addresses two issues, although he does not always distinguish between them. One is the formation of the American Jewish identity in a personal context and the other is the impact of popular myths on the historical craft. Personal experience and family legends, he acknowledges, are an essential part of identity. They inevitably impinge on questions about perception of the past, present, self, society and historical community. History, Zipperstein has come to understand, depends very much on where you stand, what you need to remember and forget. In speaking about his own family origins, a town in Belarus called Lahishin, he describes not a place but an attitude:

My grandfather's (on my father's side) townlet, Lahishin, a dorf (village) is what he and other relatives called it, was destroyed or so I was told. [...] Surprisingly, little more was said about it. The geography of the place was eventually rendered still more obscure from me when my grandfather, soon before his death in the mid-1950s, insisted that he was born in Poland, not Russia or the Soviet Union, as I was certain he had said before. Russia, that fiercely politicized place, was now moved somewhere beyond Lahishin, and the birthplace of my father's family was gone, level by pogromists, its Jews decimated and scattered.

Imagine my surprise when later I glanced at a road map of Belarus and noticed Lahishin, just off a main strip of highway, a small place with little to distinguish itself apparently but from annihilation. I mentioned this to an uncle who had been born there—

he smiled as if he wasn't much surprised (pp. 12-13).

Although one can read this passage an honest geographical mistake—after all, the borders in that part of the world have changed several times, and it's not so surprising that people might identify their birthplace in different ways—Zipperstein seems to think differently. He seems to be saying that immigrant Jews of his parents' generation were bent on forgetting their origins while recalling only the hateful aspects of East European life: pogroms, hate, poverty. In his view, it is exactly such distortions of historical truth, in favor of a more palatable personal "truth," that awaken in the historian questions about the value of objectivity and subjectivity. Instead of ignoring personal truths, Zipperstein shows that they all too often impinge on professional work. Moreover, they should not be expunged—that would be impossible anyway—rather, they can help us understand the motivations for a variety of important phenomena such as cultural creation and the construction of identity.

For example, in his chapter "Shtetl There and Here," Zipperstein treats the representation of the shtetl in American Jewish life and fiction. Examining the moment in American society when Jewish memory became irresistible, he shows how Irving Howe links his own Jewish identity with the Holocaust: "I cannot prove a connection between the Holocaust and the turn to Jewish themes in American fiction, at first urgent and quizical, later fashionable and manipulative. I cannot prove that my own turn to Yiddish literature during the fifties was due to the shock following the war years. But it would be foolish to scant the possibility" (p. 30). Even though the qualities attributed to Eastern European Jews are similar—weak, over-intellectual, melancholy, poor, self-conscious—he reiterates the point that "myths" provide an entry into a search for Jewish identity.

Ignoring myths is one danger but submitting to stylish ideology is still another. For instance, in his chapter on writing about the Holocaust, Zipperstein chastises Michael Bernstein for the latter's criticism of those who, writing about pre-World War II Jewish life, put on the lens of the Holocaust and see history as overly determined. From this viewpoint, Bernstein is right to criticize Ernst Pawel's biography of Franz Kafka (1984) since Pawel describes Kafka's world from the viewpoint of its death rather than as a living, growing organism. But, Zipperstein counters: "How could the Holocaust not intrude on this narrative? ... Had these references to the Shoah been excised, their absence itself would likely have been apparent. This would have constituted an unnecessary subversion of the text in the name of self-restraint and dispassion, in the name of silence without historical value especially

NOTEWORTHY BOOKS

Editor's Note: The following is a list of books received from publishers but, as of this printing, have not been reviewed for Menorah Review.

- Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment: Mapping and Analysis.* By Manfred Gerstenfeld. Jerusalem: Rabin Mass Ltd.
- Homo Mysticus: A Guide to Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed.* By Jose Faur. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- The Rich and the Poor: Jewish Philanthropy and Social Control in Nineteenth Century London.* By Mordechai Rozin. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press.
- Opening the Gates: How Proactive Conversion Can Revitalize the Jewish Community.* By Gary A. Tobin. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- The Theatre of the Holocaust (Volume 2: Six Plays).* Edited by Robert Skloot. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- The Jewish Moral Virtues.* By Eugene B. Borowitz and Frances Weiman Schwartz. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Messianic Judaism: A Rabbi's Journal Through Religious Change in America.* By Carol Harris-Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press.
- The Leo Frank Case.* By Leonard Dinnerstein. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Must a Jew Believe Anything?* By Menachem Kellner. Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.
- The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture.* By Lois C. Dubin. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Maimonides' Political Thought: Studies in Ethics, Law and the Human Ideal.* By Howard Kreisel. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Israel in Search of Identity: Reading the Formative Years.* By Nissim Rejwan. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- After the Holocaust: Rebuilding the Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany.* By Michael Brenner. NJ: Princeton University Press.
- In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria 1918-1933.* Edited by Michael Brenner and Derek J. Penslar. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Final Solution: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews.* By Gotz Aly. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Exodus to Humanism: Jewish Identity Without Religion.* By David Ibray. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Beyond Reasonable Doubt.* By Louis Jacobs. Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.
- Gog and Magog: A Novel.* By Martin Buber. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- More Words More Arrows: A Further Collection of Yiddish Folk Sayings.* By Shirley Kumove. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Franz Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking."* Edited by Alan Udoff and Barbara E. Galli. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Sonderstab Musik: Music Confiscations by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg Under the Nazi Occupation of Western Europe.* By Willem de Vries. The Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press.
- Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad.* By Gordon Thomas. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices Within Judaism.* By David Hartman. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing.
- The British Government and the Holocaust: The Failure of Anglo-Jewish Leadership.* By Meier Sompolinsky. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press.
- Profiles of a Lost World: Memoirs of East European Jewish Life Before World War II.* By Hirsz Abramowicz. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- The Banality of Good and Evil: Moral Lessons From the Shoah and Jewish Tradition.* By David R. Blumenthal. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism.* By Larry W. Hurtado. Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark.
- Separate and Unequal: The Inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem.* By Amir S. Cheshin, Bill Hutman and Avi Melamed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination.* By S. Lillian Kremer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World.* Edited by Stephen C. Barton. Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark.
- German Jews: A Dual Identity.* By Paul Mendes-Flohr. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- The Jewish Discovery of Islam.* Edited by Martin Kramer. Israel: Tel Aviv University.
- New Talmudic Readings.* By Emmanuel Levinas. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- When Night Fell: An Anthology of Holocaust Short Stories.* Edited by Linda Schermer and Marc Lee Raphael. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters and Dialogues.* Edited by Judith Buber Agassi. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Affirming the Covenant: A History of Temple B'rith Kodesh, Rochester, New York, 1848-1998.* By Peter Eisenstadt. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust.* By Judith Tydor Baumel. London: Vallentine Mitchell.

since the ravages of the Holocaust were clearly on Pawel's subtle, richly imaginative, brooding mind" (p. 102).

Historical writing, Zipperstein seems to be saying, has to abandon some of its own presiding principles, such as the principle of objectivity. But how far does he really go? Fans of Hayden White and postmodernism ultimately will be disappointed with Zipperstein's conclusions since, in the end, he sides with Jewish historiography that is traditionally engaged. He lavishly praises the early essays of Semyon Dubnov, which, as many have noted, reflect the author's personal frustration and anger at the oppression of the Jewish people in Russia. After all, Dubnov had not been able to study at a university, could not live legally in the capital and found it difficult to earn a living. About these essays, Zipperstein writes:

Rather than viewing these as testimony to his lapses from sobriety, it may be more useful to consider the two central features of Dubnov's essays—their simultaneous insistence on detachment and their evident, pronounced fierce engagement with the subject matter and, in particular, with the people who are its subject and the author's overriding passion—as two sides of the same coin. [...] These

pieces may be revisited usefully today as an intriguing, anxious road map for the Jewish historian: a portrait of the uneasy relationship between detachment and engagement, metahistory and social history, historical knowledge as a substitute for religious faith and as a transparent, unmediated source of truth about the world (pp. 90-91).

As Zipperstein sees it, the contest is not merely between objectivity and its opposite but also between historians that are engaged with and nourish the Jewish people and those who do not. Since he lauds engagement in history, I was surprised by the absence of a chapter on Zionist historiography. Certainly there one would be apt to find less rigorous objectivity and a heightened fidelity to emotional imperatives.

The "engagement" of the historian, as one can imagine, is not an unmixed blessing. After all, while we might sacrifice "objectivity" in favor of some degree of engagement, where would we draw the line? Isn't there a point at which all history turns into propaganda? Furthermore, instead of an aid to knowledge, don't popular myths sometimes lead the historian into misjudgment? One easily realizes that a strict commitment to dispassionate objectivity has the advantage of being a fixed principle, while en-

gagement and subjectivity contain epistemological flaws. But, what if, as Zipperstein asserts, these flawed instruments are really the only ones capable of attaining kinds of knowledge out of objectivity's reach?

Although the epistemological issues here have been the sites of countless pitched battles, the underlying premise of the book—that Russian Jewish culture and history are important to American Jewish identity—is timely. As many American Jews continue to rush to their East European roots for the nourishment of their spiritual needs, it is important for the historians of that area to meditate on the relationship between the prerogatives of popular and academic culture. As to whether contemporary Jewish historians should play the role of Dubnov and serve as advocates for the spiritual health of the Jewish people, I must admit my suspicions. I would prefer, as much as possible, to keep the borders secure: myth and popular knowledge on one side, historically reliable and verifiable truth on the other. Having said that, I recommend this stimulating book to both sides of the ideological divide.

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